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ABSTRACT

The Pro/Con Campus Debate and Community Forum program at The Ohio State University serves the educational mission of the department of communication and contributes to the intellectual life of the student body and the larger community by emphasizing the needs of the audience. Eschewing jargon and rhetorical tricks, the program encourages the students to provide their several audiences with both sides of a controversial issue in understandable and argumentative communication. Four 7-minute speeches, two pro and two con, are followed by a 3-minute cross examination by the other side. A 20-minute questioning period encourages free audience participation. Topics for the student debates and the community forums with outside speakers are chosen with the object of education for the student audience. To help create acceptance and long term recognition, a symbol and logo were created for use on all program materials. Costs of the program are minimal, usually under $100.00 per event. Although there are no winners in the traditional sense, the audience, which is surveyed before and after each debate, is the real beneficiary. (Appendixes include examples of graphics, sample formats, and an audience questionnaire.) (JL)

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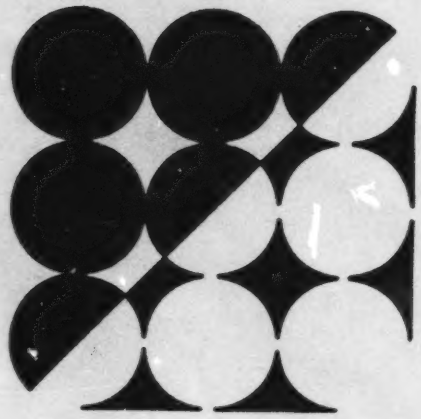
ADVOCACY IN THE PUBLIC FORUM

THE PRO/CON PROGRAM

AT OHIO STATE



Central States Speech Association

1982 Conference

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

April 17, 1982

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ADVOCACY IN THE PUBLIC FORUM
THE PRO/CON PROGRAM
AT OHIO STATE

The Pro/Con Campus Debate and Community Forum program was started in 1978 by the Department of Communication. The purpose of this paper is to provide detail of the theoretical grounding, philosophy, and management of the Ohio State program.

Theoretical Grounding. The 1960's and 1970's saw a movement in the study of rhetoric which had implications for debate and forensic programs. Robert L. Scott, for example, persuasively argued that the study and practice of rhetoric were epistemologically substantive.[1] Scott was one of many scholars who moved away from the former elocutionary movement which devoted attention primarily to delivery. Both the elocutionists and stylists reflected the influence of Peter Ramus and his disciple Omar Talon. Golden, Berquist, and Coleman summarized the truncation of rhetoric:

> In the second half of the sixteenth century, Ramus, A French philosopher, sought to realign logic and rhetoric. Under logic or dialect, he argued, belonged the cannons of invention and disposition. Since rhetoric, on the other hand, should not be permitted to share the subject matter, it should consist merely of style and delivery.[2]

Others contributed to the movement away from a truncated rhetoric. Karl Wallace labeled the substance of rhetoric as being "good reasons" which "implies the indissoluable relationship between content and form, and keeps attention on what form is saying."[3] Walter Fisher built on the contribution of Wallace

and others when he explored the meaning of "logic" in the expression "logic of good reasons."[4]

Just as Scott and others moved rhetoric away from style and elocution, Chaim Perelman and Stephen Toulmin moved the study of reasoning away from the a-rhetorical, a-historical, closed axiomatic, mathematical studies to the rhetorically rich field of jurisprudence.[5]

The late Douglas Ehninger, "a debate coach of some considerable repute,"[6] joined Toulmin and Perelman in demonstrating the key role argumentation plays in reasonable decision making and in reasonable persuasive methodologies. A recent tribute to Ehninger, Explorations in Rhetoric, reaffirmed in symposium form the importance of rhetoric and its firm bond with dialectic.[7] Of interest is one of the essays "Perspectives on Judicial Reasoning" in which Golden and Makau argue that the audience for judicial reasoning approaches Perelman's universal audience in that it represents the real and also the ideal.[8]

Accordingly, the empirical grounding of rhetoric as "good reasons" and turning it away from the emphasis on style, the recognition of argumentation as the key to reasonable decision making, plus the recent emphasis on the audience, provide the theoretical grounding for a debate program committed to the substantive debate addressed to a reasonable audience.

Philosophy. In the effort to capture a "rhetorical dimension," the Ohio State Pro/Con program became similar to the

program at the University of Illinois.[9] Unlike Illinois' broad forensic program, the Ohio State program consists only of campus debates and community forums.[10] A program of this sort must have what Ritter refers to as accountability: " The substance and style of debates must stand up under the scruitiny of public view."[11] We adhere to several assumptions similar to those held by the directors of the Illinois' program:

> 1. The debate program should serve the educational mission of the Department of Communication, and
>
> 2. The debate program should make a contribution to the intellectual life of the student body and the larger Columbus and Ohio Communities.

In 1975 the Department of Communication incorporated the principles of Wayne Brockriede's essay "Where is Argument" into a policy statement which serves as a guideline for the search of knowledge in communication at Ohio State.[12] These assumptions and this policy shaped the philosophy of the program. Because of the importance of the program to serve several communities, the emphasis on the audience rather than the debaters became paramount. Miller recognized the problem when he described community service programs as demanding "close adaption to different audiences and different speaking situations.[13] Accordingly, the program was designed to emphasize coherent and persuasive argumentation (rather than structural and formal debating) and to appeal to varied responsible audiences; similar to what Wenzel called "real life argumentation."[14]

In keeping with this philosophy, student speakers are trained in the usual reasoning and speaking skills necessary for good argument; however, the training is audience centered. In contrast to many traditional debates, speakers are asked to provide careful and in some cases simplistic definitions of terms. Jargon is discouraged; however, the debaters usually adopt some familiar terms on the topic subject in their research. They are encouraged to relay their messages in plain, simple language.

The Pro/Con philosophy then is to provide to its several audiences both sides of a controversial question in understandable and argumentative communication.

Management. Consistent with the philosophy, the program format includes four seven-minute speeches, two Pro and two Con, followed by a three-minute cross examination by the other side. A twenty-minute questioning period was planned to encourage free audience participation. Audience members question any speaker or either side of the topic of the evening. This differs from tournament debating in that an inquisitive and reasoned audience may ask varied questions about the topic, not necessarily those previously discussed in the debate. Although it used a much looser format, the Chapel Hill Open Forum experience provides a criteria for active audiences:

> Because each speaker could be questioned and interrogators could be called on by the audience to speak, and because the

> opposition was present and ready with refutation, speakers were not free to depart from respectable evidence and reasonable inference.[15]

A student moderator rotates audience questions between the Pro and Con sides in order to assure an exploration of all sides of the question. The program is then concluded with a five-minute summary speech from one member of both and Pro and the Con. The reaction of the participants, both students and outside debaters, has been positive; this Pro/Con format encourages direct clash and speakers are kept on the relevant aspects of the topic by the actively participating audience.

Two debate forums are scheduled at OSU each Fall, Winter, and Spring Quarter. There usually is one student campus debate and one community forum with outside debaters. Topics are determined with the object of education for the student audience; however, there are usually many in the audience from outside the college community. College students are hopefully equipped to enter a competitive world with broad-based / data and opinions about many social, political, and economic topics, not necessarily gained from the classroom. Accordingly, topics have included:

> Resolved, that the President of the United States should serve only one six year term.
>
> Resolved, that the United States should reinstate the draft.
>
> Resolved that homosexual persons should not be denied equal protection under the law on the basis of their sexual or affectional preference.

Resolved, that the power of unions representing public employees should be significantly increased.

Resolved, that the United States and other food producing countries should form an argicultural marketing alliance.

Resolved, that a moratorium be placed on genetic engineering.

Resolved, that the Federal Reserve's current operating procedures for controlling money should be replaced.

Resolved, that private insurance companies be permitted to write worker's compensation in the State of Ohio.

Resolved, that heavy-duty trucks do not pay their fair share of highway maintenance.

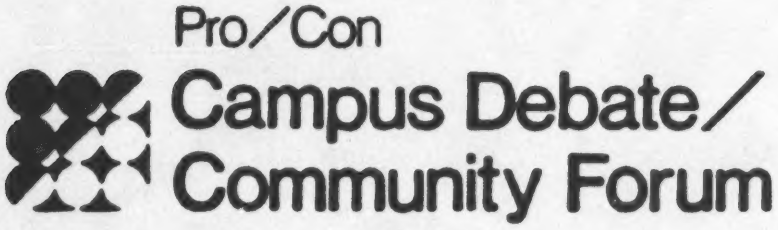
Resolved, that Ohio hazardous waste laws are inadequate to protect human health and the environment.

Resolved, that the American judicial system has over emphasized the rights of the accused.

The goals and philosophy of the program require that debaters deviate from some of the common traditional tournament styles of debate. Pro and Con debaters are familiar with both affirmative and negative definitions before the debate begins. The important arguments on both sides of the question are shared in advance to insure that the audience will hear important aspects of the question rather than mere rhetorical ploys by one side to trick the other on some minute point. Finally, speakers are instructed to speak very slowly for full audience understanding. This helps speakers to get right to the important and arguable aspects of the question in a short amount of time.

Admittedly, outside speakers are not as controlled as student speakers. These outside speakers are briefed extensively on what the OSU audience consists of, their interests, and what they might do if they do not hear the information they expect to hear. Outside speakers are selected on the basis of their expertice on the subject and reputation as public speakers. Columbus, Ohio's largest city and home of the state government, offers a wealth of talented advocates.

As in any program, however, there are necessary efforts other than training and planning. We have found that visual graphics were important to the recognition of the Pro/Con program. To help in the acceptance and recognition on a long-term basis, a symbol and logotype were created. The symbol consists of nine similar circles which fit within an imaginary square. The similar circles are tangent to one another in a matrix of three. The imaginary square has an implied diagonal extending from the top right hand corner to the bottom left hand corner of the square. The diagonal is represented by a figure/ground relationship. The top third (figure) is composed of three black circles, the bottom third (ground) is made up of white circles, and the middle third is made up of three half black and half white circles:



The white and black circles forming the symbol abstractly represent the Pro and Con of a debate; the two sides of an issue, points and counterpoints, those for the issue, those against the issue, and those undecided. The equality in size and placement of circles denote impartiality. The logotype and symbol are used in advertising, programming, and on the podium of all Pro/Con debates. Several programs and fliers utilizing these graphics are reproduced for your ready reference as Appendix A. They are set in black type and colored stock for easily readability and program identification.

Budget considerations are quite modest since speakers are not compensated for their appearance and auditorium facilities are provided by the University. Printing and advertising costs are under $100 per event and student debaters are occasionally treated to a dinner out. (There are the usual overhead associated costs of postage, telephone, etc. but, they are minimal.)

There are no "winners" in the traditional sense, since this is a joint effort by the debaters. A vote is taken before

and after to determine the extent of audience opinion shift. Both a visual and a written ballot are used; the latter is reproduced as Appendix B.

The real winner of the debate, however, is the audience. Audiences enter the auditorium either with an opinion, without an opinion, or someplace in between; they leave the auditorium with a reinforced opinion or a changed one, based on the diligent efforts of four debaters committed to improving the quality of everyone's decision making.

Pro/Con

Campus Debate/ Community Forum

Do Our Courts Pamper Criminals?

The Department of Communication
The Ohio State University

Resolved: That the American Judicial system has overemphasized the rights of the accused.

free admission
audience participation

7:30pm Thursday
February 25, 1982

OSU Law School Auditorium

OSU campus debates

Resolved: That the American Judicial system has overemphasized the rights of the accused.

Pro: Dawn Wilson, Freshman in Journalism from Mineral Ridge

Kevin Kimble, Sophomore in Criminology from Marysville

Con: John Kookootsedes, Junior in Political Science from Lima

Dave Eucker, Sophomore in Communication from Columbus

Moderator: Bill Frank, Sophomore in Accounting from Massillon

Watch for announcements of the Pro/Con events Spring Quarter!

format

7:30

Call to Order
Announcement of Resolution
Initial Audience Vote
Introduction of Speakers
The Debate
- First Affirmative Speech
- Cross Examination
- First Negative Speech
- Cross Examination
- Second Affirmative Speech
- Cross Examination
- Second Negative Speech
- Cross Examination

Audience Questions/Answers

Negative Summary
Affirmative Summary

Final Audience Vote
Announcement of voting results

Pro/Con
Campus Debate/
Community Forum

Chairman:	James L. Golden
Director:	Josina M. Makau
Assistant Director	John D. Stegman
Graphics:	Goldie Pajkert
Ushers:	Interfraternity Council
Arrangements	Pat Jeffries
	Phil Neff
	Maria Chakeres
	Mark Goldfarb

Pro/Con
Campus Debate/
Community Forum

Program

The Ohio State University
Department of Communication

Law School Auditorium

February 25, 1982

APPENDIX B

PRO/CON BALLOT

Resolved: That the power of unions representing public employees should be significantly increased.

Please circle ONE of the following BEFORE the debate begins:

1. I strongly favor the resolution;
2. I favor the resolution;
3. I oppose the resolution;
4. I strongly oppose the resolution;
5. I have no opinion on the resolution.

Please circle ONE of the following after the constructive speeches and BEFORE the audience participation:

1. I strongly favor the resolution;
2. I favor the resolution;
3. I oppose the resolution;
4. I strongly oppose the resolution;
5. I still have no opinion on the resolution.

Please circle ONE of the following at the CONCLUSION of the debate:

1. I strongly favor the resolution;
2. I favor the resolution;
3. I oppose the resolution;
4. I strongly oppose the resolution;
5. I still have no opinion on the resolution.

Please give this ballot to the ushers on your way out of the auditorium.

MANY THANKS FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

Notes

[1]Robert L. Scott, "On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic," Central States Speech Journal 18 (1967), 9-17.

[2]James L. Golden, Goodwin F. Berquist and William E. Coleman, The Rhetoric of Western Thought (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 1976, p. 145.

[3]Karl R. Wallace, "The Substance of Rhetoric: Good Reasons," The Quarterly Journal of Speech 49 (1963), 239-249.

[4]Walter R. Fisher, "Toward a Logic of Good Reasons," The Quarterly Journal of Speech 64 (1978), 376-384.

[5]Ch. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, The New Rhetoric, A Treatise on Argumentation, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame: Notre Dame, 1969). Stephen Toulmin, The Uses of Argument (London: Cambridge University, 1958).

[6]Marilyn J. VanGraber, "Dedication," Explorations in Rhetoric (Glenview: Scott Foresman, 1982), p. ix.

[7]Ray E. McKerrow, ed. Explorations in Rhetoric (Glenview: Scott Foresman, 1982).

[8]James L. Golden and Josina M. Makau, "Perspectives on Judicial Reasoning," Explorations in Rhetoric (Glenview: Scott Foresman, 1982), pp. 157-177.

[9]Kurt W. Ritter, "Recapturing the Thetorical Dimension: Debating in Campus Forums," Speaker and Gavel 12 (Fall 1974), 1-3.

[10]Kurt W. Ritter, "Debate and a Liberal Arts Education: The Forensics Program at the University of Illinois," Speaker and Gavel 14 (Summer 1977), 72-84. Ohio State's tournament debating activities are part of the University's student affairs program and therefore are not affiliated with the Department of Communication.

[11]Ritter, 1977, p. 74.

[12]Wayne Brockriede, "Where is Argument," Journal of the American Forensic Association, 11 (Spring 1975), 179-182.

[13]N. Edd Miller, "Community Service Programs in Forensics," The Central States Speech Journal 7 (1955), 12.

[14]Joseph W. Wenzel, "Campus and Community Programs in Forensics: Needs and Opportunities," Journal of American Forensic Association 7 (Spring 1971), 253-259.

[15]James Worth Pence, Jr. "Chapel Hill's Open Forum, Today's Speech 16 (1968), 28.